



Understanding Indigenous Food Sovereignty through an Indigenous Research Paradigm

Tabitha Martens, M. Env.
University of Manitoba

Jaime Cidro, PhD
University of Winnipeg

Michael Anthony Hart, PhD
University of Manitoba

Stéphane McLachlan, PhD
University of Manitoba

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Abstract

The Indigenous food sovereignty (IFS) movement offers insight into food-related challenges that confront Indigenous Peoples in Canada. The philosophy of IFS is holistic in nature and sees food as encompassing all facets of being – the mental, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual. Thirty-two interviews were conducted across western Canada to better understand Indigenous food sovereignty practices. Indigenous research methodologies offer further insight into IFS studies, in part, through an epistemology centered on experiential knowledge, relational accountability, respect, and reciprocity. The values of these methodologies are reflected in this research regarding IFS, and provide an important and appropriate context for this work. In particular, metaphor, as a research tool, helps to further the understanding of IFS by acknowledging the harmony that can and should exist between food and nature.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous food sovereignty has been described as a living reality for Indigenous people in Canada and refers to a re-connection to land-based food and political systems (Morrison, 2011; Martens, 2015). Following a series of interviews with individuals practicing Indigenous food sovereignty in western Canada, a circle model was developed

to analyze data, and tell the associated stories of the participants and their Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives. Hands, as metaphor, emerged as a strong theme throughout the research and was used to help present resulting elements expressed through a circle model. Community stories woven around and through the use of the hands metaphor represent an important step in acknowledging and respecting Indigenous knowledges. The use of the circle model is both a “wholistic” (Absolon, 2011) and powerful complement to the topic itself. In examining Indigenous food sovereignty as a lived and living experience, the circle model has allowed for connections to emerge organically, much as they would in nature.

The face of Indigenous scholarship has shifted dramatically over the last 20 years, in turn reflecting a concomitant shift in the methods used to conduct this research. Rather than research done *on* Indigenous communities and people, it is now widely recognized that research should be conducted in collaboration *with* Indigenous communities and more recently *by* Indigenous communities and Indigenous scholars (Hart, 2009). The results have become more relevant to the needs of the community, and research practices have become grounded in cultural and spiritual ways of being specific to those communities. The increasing emergence of Indigenous scholars has led the charge of Indigenous research methodologies. We can look to the works of Pam Colorado (1988), Laurie Gilchrist (1997), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Marlene Brant Castellano (2004) as early Indigenous scholars that critiqued mainstream academic approaches to research and research ethics. These methodologies have since incorporated a wide diversity of approaches, including those that use metaphor in research (Absolon, 2011); storytelling as data analysis (Cidro, 2012); and conversational approaches to data collection (Kovach, 2010). Despite the examples of methodological approaches and research paradigms found in the literature, there is very little information of how these tools can be used by researchers. Thus, informed and inspired by the work of Indigenous authors, this paper describes the research methods in which an Indigenous research framework was used to explore the importance of Indigenous food sovereignty (IFS) across western Canada.

INDIGENOUS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Throughout Canada, and indeed across the world, Indigenous people are facing higher than average levels of food insecurity (Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2013; First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2012; Ledrou & Gervais, 2005), a state of hunger “referring to both the inability to secure an adequate diet today and the risk of being unable to do so in the future” (Council of Canadian Academies, 2014, p. XXV). Reported rates of food insecurity have ranged from 33.3% of off-reserve households (Health Canada, 2007) to 100% in a northern Manitoba First Nation community (Thompson, Lozeznik, Gulrukh, Ballard, Islam, Beardy, et al., 2011). Food security studies are common in North America, and in particular for Indigenous communities; however, they have been criticized for failing to adequately address the food conditions, histories and relationships of Indigenous people (Cidro, Adekunle, Peters & Martens, 2015; Loppie Reading & Wien, 2009; Power, 2008; Willows, 2005).

Food sovereignty, on the other hand, considers the cultural, political and environmental aspects of food systems. While the two terms are related, they differ in their approaches and their results: with its focus on the supply of food to communities, food security ignores the power inherent in food systems, power that is expressed through food sovereignty (Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013). Food sovereignty aims to link production to consumption and recognizes both the people and the power inherent in food systems (Desmarais, 2008; Wittman, Desmarais, & Wiebe, 2010). First proposed in 1996 by *La Via Campesina*, an international effort of farmers, peasants, and land-based workers, food sovereignty aimed to move beyond food security in addressing food-related challenges that confront oppressed peoples in Latin America and now the world (Desmarais, 2004). Masioli & Nicholson (2010) have defined food sovereignty as:

the right of peoples to decide and produce their own food. It is a political right to organize ourselves, to decide what to plant, to have control of seeds. Food sovereignty is a very broad concept that includes the right of access to seeds, the right to produce, to trade, to consume one's own foods.... it is a concept that is linked to the autonomy and sovereignty of peoples. (p. 12)

Food sovereignty becomes particularly important in an Indigenous context, where past food dealings were fraught with manipulation and racism. The disappearance of the bison on the Canadian prairies, for example, ended a way of life where bison were part of

a traditional and cultural system, and shifted the balance of power between First Nations and the Canadian state (Daschuk, 2013). As Daschuk (2013) noted: “First Nations leaders saw treaties first and foremost as a bridge to a future without bison” (p. 183). Food-related challenges still exist for Indigenous communities today with relatively high food prices for northern reserves (Thompson, Lozeznik, Gulrukh, Ballard, Islam, Beardy, et al., 2011; Skinner, Hanning, & Tsuji, 2006), and concerns around industry-related contamination of foods, and landscape changes and disruptions such as forestry and hydropower threatening land-based traditional food systems (Thompson et al., 2011; McLachlan, 2014). Clearly, the power in food systems needs to be addressed with and by Indigenous communities (Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013). In linking food production with consumption, presenting food as sacred (People’s Food Policy Project, 2011) and establishing the need for policy reform (Morrison, 2011) Indigenous food sovereignty provides a means of doing so.

Despite being described as a “living reality” for thousands of years, Indigenous food sovereignty (IFS) in Canada has only recently appeared in the literature, largely through the work of grassroots organizations such as the BC Food Systems Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (Morrison, 2011, p. 97) and the People’s Food Policy Program Indigenous Advisory Circle (PFPP, 2011); indeed, it arguably still represents an afterthought in the food-related literature. Similarly, despite the importance and relevance of food sovereignty to social work, it is unaddressed area within the profession. In light of the importance of sovereignty to Indigenous peoples and the key role social work should be playing in addressing it and the colonial oppression Indigenous peoples face, social needs to realign itself to reflect the aspirations of the peoples it serves. These aspirations include food sovereignty.

Indeed, food sovereignty is a concept and a practice that reflects and helps create awareness and recommendations around issues such as land reform, treaty rights and obligations, and the rebuilding of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (PFPP, 2011). These are fundamental steps in social work practice with Indigenous peoples. The profession will be well served to consider the four principles of Indigenous food sovereignty that the Indigenous Food Systems Network has proposed: 1) food is sacred and should be treated as such; 2) participation in land-based food activities

is important and requires an action-based approach; 3) self-determination of food systems is critical; and 4) policy reform is a necessary component to addressing and achieving Indigenous food sovereignty goals (Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, 2011). The interconnections among culture, heritage, spirituality, and politics, can make Indigenous food sovereignty difficult to define. Emphasis on the people and the place (or territory) of a people means that Indigenous people have a responsibility to their land systems, one that is “achieved by upholding our long-standing sacred responsibilities to nurture healthy, interdependent relationships with the land, plants, and animals that provide us with our food” (Morrison, 2011, p. 100). These relationships can be seen through examples of IFS in practice, including hunting, fishing, gathering, harvesting, and growing food (Grey and Patel, 2014). In Canada, some community initiatives have been highlighted in more detail, including the Urban Aboriginal Garden Project in British Columbia, that uses elements of the medicine wheel in their garden and culture programming (Mundel & Chapman, 2010). In the United States, the White Earth Land Recovery Project’s fight around protecting their traditional wild rice from genetically modified strains has been documented by food activist Winona LaDuke (2005) for many years. Insights into these and other community food initiatives helped form our own thinking about Indigenous food sovereignty. Indeed, we were curious and inspired to discover more practices of Indigenous food sovereignty by communities across western Canada.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Regional food experts were consulted to help better conceptualize Indigenous food sovereignty in western Canada; these conversations helped to frame the study. Twenty-four community-based Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives were identified across British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, with 32 participants speaking on behalf of their projects. The majority of these initiatives took place on reserve, although two of the projects featured traditional Metis communities. In some cases, more than one person asked to be interviewed. In one case, a participant wanted to feature two food projects, but most interviews were conducted with just one person. The interviews varied in length from half hour to two hours. Most of the interviews were phone-based, although 12 interviews were conducted in person at the request of the

participant. Later, many more of the research participants met the lead author in person; the relationships we embarked on did not end with the completion of the research. Interviews were transcribed in their entirety and were sent to participants for review. Likewise, results were analyzed and shared with the participants so that they could reflect on the analysis and how they saw they project and stories fitting within the project as a whole.

INDIGENOUS RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Moving through our research process, we had to pause and reconsider the changing nature of both our own thinking and the evolution of the data collection. These processes began to reflect a larger worldview than we had originally intended. As our thinking began to align with the work, and with the relationships that were created with the participants, an Indigenous research framework began to emerge. Indigenous research frameworks, or paradigms, have been described by a number of Indigenous scholars (e.g. Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; Lavallee, 2007; Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Lavallee, 2009; Hart, 2010). As Kovach (2009) has stated, a framework can express the “theoretical and practical underpinnings of their research” (p. 39). Perhaps most importantly is the idea that an Indigenous research framework makes space and place for Indigenous knowledge (Kovach, 2009). For this research, in particular, traditional knowledge and the value of experience were at the heart of data collection. Hart (2010) indicates that an Indigenous research paradigm is made up of four components; an ontology whereby “how people see the world will influence their understanding of what exists, and vice-versa” (p. 7); an epistemology where Elders are relied upon for their insight and experience and is subjective; a methodology based on the idea of relational accountability (Wilson, 2001) and a commitment to the collective of Indigenous societies (Kovach, 2005); and an axiology that examines the values and actions of a research paradigm. Such approaches make special value of respect, safety, and self-awareness (Hart, 2010). Lavallee (2009) has offered a framework where she used the teachings of the medicine wheel along with sharing circles, and integrating the values, beliefs and practices of the community she was working with.

The framework that guided this research consisted of an epistemology that focused on experience, or the involvement of the participants in their own food projects;

a methodology based on respect, reciprocity, and relational accountability whereby we situated ourselves in our research, contributed a narrative chapter to a Masters thesis, and hosted an Indigenous food gathering for research participants to attend; and perhaps most importantly, an approach to analysis that was based on metaphor, and the medicine wheel; a method of analysis that was decidedly “wholistic” (Absolon, 2011).

Situating Ourselves

The importance of situating yourself in your research- describing who you are and how you came to be- has been documented by Indigenous scholars (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Wilson, 2008). Three of the researchers involved in this project are Indigenous; one is a Settler. The primary author and lead researcher is a mixed ancestry Cree woman, with family in the Interlake region of Manitoba, including Peguis First Nation and Fisher River Cree First Nation. All researchers were “outsiders” to the communities that agreed to be part of this study.

Epistemology

Hart (2010) has argued that epistemology is a key component of an Indigenous research paradigm, such as using a process for gathering knowledge that is subjective and reliant on Elders and others with this insight. Ermine (1995) has stated that Aboriginal epistemology is “grounded in the self, the spirit, and the unknown” (p. 108). The role and value of experience and voice (Graveline, 2000) - both participant experience and the experience of the primary author- drove this research process.

Conversations with participants were centered on their experiences in their food projects and communities, looking at both challenges and supports or successes. Participants were also invited to share stories and photographs of their food initiatives as further evidence of Indigenous food sovereignty as lived experience. Experience is vital to an epistemology, particularly for Indigenous research. Indeed, Kovach (2005) has stated that experience, storytelling, and collectivity are valid ways of knowing. For a topic such as Indigenous food sovereignty, these become the most meaningful way of knowing the intricacies of food projects and programs (how they relate or are supported by the community, for example) because they are told through the eyes of those that champion them. As Brant Castellano (2004) has noted, “Traditional teachings are

conveyed through example, through stories and songs, in ceremonies, and most importantly, through engagement with the natural world” (p.100). Bell-Sheetter (2011) has argued for Indigenous community members, as voices working on the ground and in the heart of community, to be acknowledged as experts on the needs and means for food sovereignty. This sentiment was echoed by the research participants of this study.

Michelle Biden shared the importance of experience and supporting the goals and values of the community as key to making the Our Food, Our Health, Our Culture Program in Saskatchewan work:

The ideas came from consulting people.... And through that process, peoples - the real interest of the community - came to light. And that's where the focus on the youth came from, the focus on the traditional foods, the focus on the gardening: that came from people's ideas. So I think whatever you do to build your support and whatever you do to find out what your community, the people in your community want, that's going to, that's going to benefit your project and that's going to lead you to success

Experience is a way we come to know (Simpson, 1999), and provides a strong foundation for Indigenous research. Likewise, experiential knowledge that is grounded in local traditions and priorities is critical to understanding both the barriers and benefits of Indigenous food sovereignty and is a necessary dialogue in moving IFS forward. In discussing the future of the Four Arrows Regional Food Security Program in Manitoba, Byron Beardy offered the following advice based on his 10 years experience working with food programming:

Build a small one-room hut and then build on that. One of the experiences that I've always seen, there's a lot of people, what I call "Do Gooders" meaning someone could come in and say "I'm going to come in and do this do that and make a whole, beautiful program, a big beautiful project to help our members." It looks good on paper, but when it's time to build, it tends to crumble

Acknowledging the voices of Indigenous people working on the ground and in the community on a path to Indigenous food sovereignty allows for a more honest portrayal of how food programs and projects are perceived and work in communities. This knowledge is critical, and moves beyond quantification - beyond statistics and other outsider tools that are often used to measure the success of food programs (Bell-Sheetter, 2004). The criticisms of food security measures clearly point to the need for Indigenous voices, values, and beliefs in food and nutrition studies (Willows, 2005;

Power, 2008).

Embracing Indigenous Methodology

Methodology has been referred to as a culture where norms and practices are used to carry out research (Ristock & Pennell, 1996). Experience as epistemology was used to reflect the methods, or the tools used to conduct this research. By following the principles of respect, relational accountability and reciprocity (Wilson, 2008; Hart, 2010) this research honoured the experience of all participants, allowing their voices to guide the research process and, in particular, the methods of data collection. Interview questions were based around the experiences of the participants in their food projects and larger community, and emphasized the characteristics of their initiatives, any promising practices they wanted to share, along with challenges they may have faced (Martens, 2015).

Through our own experience as researchers and educators, as well in the social work profession, working with Indigenous communities, we have discovered when you are offered an opportunity to speak with someone or when someone goes out of their way to introduce you to a person that they feel you should speak with, this is an honour and a blessing. It is a path you should consider for the sake of the relationships around you. When you are presented with these offerings - these gifts of time, respect, and relationship - it is important to acknowledge them. These offerings, community experts speaking about local issues and sharing their knowledge and connections, are a key component of Indigenous research. Michell (2009) has shared the similarities between Indigenous research and gathering berries: "Like research, discovering the right time to gather berries usually begins by consulting and visiting with knowledgeable people in the community" (p.67). Nature has seasons and operates according to its own timing. Indigenous food studies would benefit from mimicking these organic processes.

The process of connecting and re-connecting can be seen as a part of relational accountability (Wilson, 2001, 2008). Indeed, Wilson (2001) has argued that through relational accountability, "you are answering to all your relations when you are doing research. You are not answering questions of validity or reliability or making judgments of better or worse. Instead you should be fulfilling your relationship to the world around you" (p.177). These ideas were often reflected in the experiences of the participants.

Harvey Knight explains the path to Indigenous food sovereignty as a goal for the Muskoday Organic Grower's Co-op in Saskatchewan:

So we have to, you know, re-think and re-focus the way we see the world around us and start developing a new relationship, start connecting and developing this new relationship with everything that surrounds us all the plant life, the land

Indigenous food sovereignty reflects the ideas and values of an Indigenous worldview. These experiences further contributed and were reflected in the research itself. This method of approaching data collection is often been referred to, in northern climates at least, as “snowball” sampling; however, the value and creation of relationships is a long established practice in Indigenous communities. Relational accountability is present within Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives. The interrelationships present in the environment was discussed by Mike Christian who developed the Splantsin Market Garden & Agroforestry in British Columbia:

Well even, even when you're managing the land, you're not just managing the plants, right? You're managing everything, you're managing the airshed. If you've got more plants growing you've got more oxygen growing, right? You got more, the carbon dioxide is managed better and all that other stuff

The relationships present through an airshed, such as described above, are present throughout research. They are waiting for you to pay attention to them.

Culturally Relevant Analysis

Data analysis allows the researcher to gain a more detailed understanding of the research (Creswell, 2009). The analysis of these data involved several approaches, a multi-phased, iterative process that allowed for emerging themes to appear over time. All transcribed interviews were read multiple times for a general sense of what the participants were offering to share (Creswell, 2009). Coding attempts were made using the computer assisted qualitative analysis software, but undermined the narrative of each interview, in effect resulting in what Wilson (2008) has described as a destruction of relationships: “And if we are saying that an Indigenous methodology includes all of these relationships, if you are breaking things down into their smallest pieces, you are destroying all of those relationships around it” (p.119). Breaking the interviews into disparate parts through coding and by ascribing numerical values did not fit with the

overarching and holistic goal of describing what Indigenous food sovereignty looked like. Nor did these efforts reflect the stories of the participants, which were often told in a holistic manner, through conversation as an interactive process (Kovach, 2010). Making meaning of the stories shared by participants demanded a look at Indigenous ways of knowing. Questioning and considering worldviews- indeed, how we come to know- created a new lens from which this research was understood. Working from a land-based paradigm, and valuing land as the original teacher, helped to connect stories to ideas and ideas to emergent themes. Placing one's self in the research also allowed for connections between knowledge to emerge between researchers and participants so that participants felt supported in how their stories were presented. Turning to the epistemology and methodology of this research- the focus of experiential knowledge and its connection to relationships- it became clear that an alternative tool was needed to make sense of the relationships that existed in and around the interviews.

Looking to other Indigenous scholars, the work of Kathy Absolon came front and center when considering data analysis. Absolon (2011) has used metaphor as a tool for analysis in her research. She made meaning of conversations, a document review, and her dreams using a tapestry of materials to represent all that she had discovered- key words, thoughts, themes - through her re-search. Ultimately, this tactile process guided her towards a flower metaphor, which she used to describe the elements of an Indigenous research framework (Absolon, 2011). Indeed, the process of incorporating participants in data analysis has been compared elsewhere to the cleansing of berries after gathering - both involve Indigenous people and the "weeding out any remaining twigs and leaves" (Michell, 2009, p. 71).

Metaphor

Metaphor has been presented by a number of Indigenous scholars as a way to make meaning of their research (Absolon, 2011; Lavallee, 2009). For her research around physical activity and healing for Aboriginal people, Lavallee (2009) piloted an "Anishnaabe Symbol-Based Reflection" where participants were asked to create or present a symbol that represented martial arts sports activities in their lives. Elsewhere, the tree has been used as a symbol to present "the relationships between individual behavior, customs, and community protocol, ethics, values, and world view" when

examining the ethics of Aboriginal research (Brant Castellano, 2004, p. 15). Absolon and Willett (2004) have also referred to Indigenous research as modern day berry picking and hunting. These authors have chosen to use food and plant-based metaphors to describe Indigenous research suggesting that there is an inherent connection and responsibility to the land in Indigenous research. That research should be meaningful to the communities whose stories are gathered is fundamental to a decolonization process (Hart, 2010). Moreover, the process for describing and explaining research processes and findings should be meaningful to the topic at hand. Metaphor is a powerful tool for accomplishing this. The use of symbols, stories, and metaphors are essential to Indigenous oral culture. Metaphor is a holistic tool for helping to understand research data, and thus has a strong place in Indigenous research (Kovach, 2009).

For this research, the metaphor chosen for characterizing Indigenous food sovereignty was one that had been spoken of throughout the research process and one that was deeply personal and reflected the senior author's own involvement in their own food system. The metaphor of "*hands*" became a new lens through which we approached the interviews. Indigenous food sovereignty requires hands at work, and certainly our observations and participation in the food initiatives of the communities involved in this study saw many hands tending to their food systems. Thinking of all of the ways that hands connect us to our culture and to our food systems, we realized the metaphor was already present, waiting to be noticed:

When I think of food sovereignty I think of hands. I think of how those hands plant a seed or tend to the earth. I think of those hands as filleting the fish or skinning the muskrat, tanning the hides. I think of those hands as healing- with the power of touch, knowledge and prayer, through the work of our healers. Or the hands that pick the medicine that make us well. They are the hands that sound the drum to awaken our spirit. The hands that reach out to help and share our food with family and friends, the hands that stir the pot of stew. They are the hands that write letters to government or hold protest signs when our land is in danger. They are the hands that can extend out to our neighbours, across provinces and territories to share and trade and create a powerful network of food. And they are the hands that are brown, or red, or white, or some combination of those colours, that speak to our ancestors; they remind us who we are and where we come from. They are the hands that have been oppressed- tied by colonialism- or slapped by government, by residential schools, by racism. And of course, there are the hands of others that have covered our mouths, trying to silence Indigenous voices (Martens, 2015, p. 37)

Several participants also spoke of hands in their interviews. Christine George, a participant from British Columbia shared the following insight into what makes the Ladybug Garden and Greenhouse work:

They really like to work up at the garden. They'll come up there and I'll have them make boxes for the Elders. But not just make the boxes. I had them square the wood and sand the edges, and nail them together; basic construction. They really took off on that. I was surprised at how careful and attentive they were. It was something different for them, and they built it. We couldn't go for a hike because it was snowy, so I got them doing that. It was like, "Oh yeah, okay." I think the more you put in front of them the more they want to learn. Hands on is one of the best things I ever find with youth, any youth (Christine George, BC)

Using this metaphor as her guide, and in consultation with project participants, teachers and Elders, the senior author felt ready to analyze the interviews from a new, and Indigenist perspective where the connections and relationships between words and ideas around hands felt front and center. Cree Elder Ipswa Mescacakanis shared another link between hands and food at the Vancouver Island Traditional Foods Conference in British Columbia:

I think also of the heart, the hands on my heart (where our native mind exists). I think of the relatedness I have when my hands touch all living things and the co-creation together

The Circle

In an academic context, circles have long been used to explain a variety of concepts (e.g., Absolon, 2010; Anderson, 2000; Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002; Hill, 2008; Lavallee, 2009). Absolon (2010) has argued that variations in circle teachings exist due to "context, teacher, and Nation" (p. 77). Regardless, circles are powerful tools for to support the relationships that exist between research elements and ideas (Hart, 2002). In coming to terms with her own Indigenous voice, the lead author was determined to present her results in a manner that was consistent with the overall framework and with the teachings she had received. A circle model, loosely informed by medicine wheel concepts such as growth and change, and centered around the metaphor of hands was developed to present the shared stories of Indigenous food sovereignty. Much like the use of hands, the value of relationality came to the forefront, especially in returning to historical teachings, as explained by Keith Hunter, from the First Nations Wildcrafters in

British Columbia:

Of course, the First Nations people, they've always seen the forest as producing food. That's nothing new. It's kind of come full circle I think. So, we worked with that in incorporating traditional knowledge, traditional harvesting practices, back to the first thing I think we were talking about, that continuity of the generations

Similarly, Mike Sutherland spoke of the underlying and cycling values of the Back to the Land Camp in Peguis, Manitoba:

If you listen to our Elders talk, they talk about us a part of everything, a part of the cycle of life, the cycle of the environment and our seasons, we're a part of it all... We were people of the land and we were hunters and gatherers and we were conservationists and making sure there was also something for our tomorrow, for our children and our grandchildren

A circle-cycle model felt tactile, and better captured what Indigenous food sovereignty looked and felt like in western Canada. Community stories were woven into and around the circle model- specifically as they related to four strong emergent themes: history; connection to the land; relationships; and identity. Each element was chosen based on key words, conversations, the senior author's own personal narrative, readings, and through ceremony and prayer. Surrounding the model, four elements were placed along with associated key words that had emerged through the data collection. These keywords helped to shape the focus of that particular element. It is important to note that this model is in no way static. Many of the keywords and the direction of the elements could have been placed elsewhere. However, the placement of each element was acknowledged and given permission to move forward by the participants. Their hands held this story too.

CONCLUSION

In allowing the words of the participants to guide, a way of life emerged; a way of being that was reflected and acted upon by the participants and the researchers alike. This way of life describes a path towards Indigenous food sovereignty, and it is our hope that this process will support and help guide other researcher understandings of Indigenous food sovereignty, at the level of the individual, the family or clan, or community. Indigenous research that is *by, for, and with* Indigenous peoples (Hart, 2009) amounts to a self-determined food system that is developed through the values and principles of Indigenous food sovereignty.

More importantly, this paper represents an example of how Indigenous values, worldviews, and knowledges can be carried throughout Indigenous research. In this instance, the epistemology, methodology, and methods were grounded in an Indigenous research framework that was harmonious with the research topic. This framework was key, as we considered both the approach to research and the topic itself to be decolonizing (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002). This is critical, for it supports the idea that Indigenous knowledge is rich and dynamic, and that it embodies the relationships and connections we make. Many scholars have presented their own Indigenous research frameworks, however, less information has been offered on how those frameworks look in practice. From start to finish, this research was guided by the participants and the work they do to advocate for Indigenous food sovereignty. Developing an Indigenous research framework is one way that we honour the work that they do. Indeed, the symmetry between Indigenous research and Indigenous food sovereignty is too strong to have been ignored. It is also important that the social work profession recognize the significant role Indigenous research plays for Indigenous peoples' anti-colonial efforts and advancing self-determination. We are people of the land, researching a land-based topic, based on our land-based epistemologies, values, principles, and beliefs. This process is a way of saying: we are here.

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AUTHOR NOTE

Tabitha Martens, M. Env. (First Author)

PhD Student

Faculty of Social Work, University of
Manitoba, Canada

Contact:

Telephone: 204-804-3393

Email: Tabitha.Martens@umanitoba.ca

Michael Anthony Hart, PhD

Associate Professor

Faculty of Social Work, University of
Manitoba, Canada

Contact:

Telephone: 204-474-9327

Email: Michael.Hart@umanitoba.ca

Jaime Cidro, PhD

Associate Professor

Department of Anthropology, University of
Winnipeg, Canada

Contact:

Telephone: 204- 789-1417

Email: j.cidro@uwinnipeg.ca

Stéphane McLachlan, PhD

Professor

Department of Environment & Geography,
University of Manitoba, Canada

Contact:

Telephone: 204- 474-9316

Email: Steph.McLachlan@umanitoba.ca